

"THE TREE OF LIFE"

BY FRANCIS WILLING WHARTON

I.

"IN what am I doing wrong?" said Miss Hathaway. "She does not amuse her husband; I do. It is nowadays a crime not to amuse your husband."

"It used, in my time, to be a crime to amuse some one else's," retorted Mrs. Dale, and there was silence between them.

"She is very pretty," began Miss Hathaway again, "and I—I am only passable. Look at her eyes! They are twice the size of mine, and it is not my fault if she keeps them half shut most of the time." She looked at Mrs. Dale to answer this argument.

"Let him alone," came the response. "Snub him a little. It won't take much; he doesn't care a piece of his little finger for you; and I don't like to have a woman come to my house to pay me a visit and have her made uncomfortable."

"She isn't uncomfortable; she likes it; I dare say she likes it," urged Miss Hathaway. "Ask her what she thinks of me, and she'll tell you I am a very nice, obliging girl."

"Who kindly engages her husband in conversation twelve hours out of the twenty-four." Mrs. Dale got up and looked down at her cousin. "I have done my duty," she said. "I have told you that I thought you were doing a reprehensible and heartless thing, and if you choose to persevere, it is your fault and Alaric Rexford's," and turning, walked away.

Miss Hathaway sat in the autumn sunshine on the grass. There were red leaves fluttering down upon her, and above the tree from which they came stretched a great arch of deep blue sky; the air was

clear and fresh. She looked about her discontentedly, however.

"People are so exacting and overdrawn—and emotional," she said, aloud. "I was doing no harm; but now—" She frowned—a very rare occurrence.

It was the shape of her eyes that you liked, the turn of her lip, the way her face lighted when she laughed. It wasn't possible to call her stunning or tremendous, and when you were asked what she looked like, you had nothing to say; but you could talk to her for hours on end, and left her reluctantly. The facts about her were that her hair was brown and dark and waved back from her forehead, that her eyes were gray, and that she was rather smaller than the average woman—none of which mattered. She did matter at times very much.

She leaned back against the tree and looked up through its nearly bare branches to the sky beyond.

"Cousin Ellen is absurd," she said, "ridiculous. She is old-fashioned; she thinks every one is in love with every one else; she does not understand that one may like a man's company without undermining his morals. Besides, Alaric Rexford cannot be harmed or improved by such as I am. He is a complete fact, the product of another civilization, and it is much more likely that he should trouble my peace of mind than I his. Though, as a matter of fact—" She dropped her eyes, and looking down at her hands clasped in her lap, smiled a very confident and secure smile.

"Probably," she added, again aloud, "Mrs. Rexford likes him as he is—not a knight of the Round Table, but, oh, such

good company! One must take people as they are; one cannot expect one person to mingle the joys of Cardinal Newman and the Earl of Rochester," and feeling that the last word had been said, Miss Hathaway rolled lightly over on the turf, and resting her head on her arms, listened to the murmur of the breeze in the high grass that grew near by.

Silence! How warm the splintered sunlight felt! How good it would be to be an animal—a hare or a squirrel—and have no cares, and plenty of nuts to crack—and perhaps an apple! But in winter! She shivered, and sitting up, saw a man coming toward her. Her peace of mind quite restored, she welcomed him in friendly fashion. She did not speak; she smiled, which always suggests that one has a great deal to say, but will take one's time to say it. She was never too ready, but gave you the feeling of having something held in reserve—she was, in fact, quite a clever young person.

The man who stood a moment looking down at her was an Englishman, who proclaimed himself. His clothes were faithful to his nation and type, made of some rough light stuff, and with that peculiar look of a natural husk that the Briton enjoys in his outer garments as no other men have yet done.

"You don't look human," he said. "You look as though you would turn into a little brown wood creature and scamper off through the grass—but don't do it."

"I certainly shall not; I wouldn't trust your sportsman's instinct; you would throw a stone at me, and carry me home and have me cooked for dinner."

Rexford dropped down beside her; he looked at her and laughed. "I think it very likely," he said, "your little bones would crunch delightfully."

Miss Hathaway shrugged her shoulders. "You are two removes from a wild beast," she said—"a panther or a jaguar, or some other big, strong, cruel creature. That is why you affect yellow suits of clothes. You don't know it, but it is reversion to type."

"Granted that I started from an animal originally," retorted Rexford, "you have to account for my mind and my soul—or do you doubt the existence of both?"

The girl looked at him. "Your mind," she said, slowly—"yes, you have a mind; a panther couldn't play chess, I suppose; he might be ingenious, but he could hardly be mathematical. Your soul—I really can't pronounce a judgment on the existence of a thing I have seen no indication of."

Rexford gave a short amused laugh. "Honest," he said, "at least; but yet you associate freely with me. Are you not afraid to rouse the sleeping—jaguar?"

"Not a bit," she said, coolly; "one is not afraid of people except for one reason—when one likes them too much."

He folded his arms, and sitting cross-legged before her, regarded her curiously. "I see; and you are sure you like me—too little?"

Her eyes met his. "I like you," she said, "just about that much;" and holding up her slight little finger, she measured off a small portion of the first joint with her thumb.

Rexford caught her hand and looked gravely into her eyes.

"That will do to begin with," he said, and released her fingers. She had miscalculated; a thrill ran through her and showed itself in a sudden blush—a deep red blush. Their eyes met again.

"Score one for me," said Rexford, watching the bright color fade; "and yet, one for you too, Madam Lion-tamer—it is such a lovely weapon."

He turned from her, and picking up a leaf, laid it on his knee and smoothed its glossy red surface. "I wonder how the leaves do it?" he said. "It's a bully way to die—turn very beautiful all in a moment, and then float off down the air."

Miss Hathaway shook her head. "There is no good way to die; don't let us talk of it. You who are full of rapid, pulsing life, how can you even?"

"May I join you?" said a voice, and under the branches stood a tall, graceful young woman; she looked first at one and then at the other. "You looked so comfortable and happy," she said, slowly, "that I thought I would come and be—comfortable and happy too." She sat down on the grass, and closing the sunshade she had held over her head in lieu of a hat, she began rolling it up. "Mrs. Dale says we are to have a dance; did she tell you?" She looked at Miss Hathaway, and then at Rexford.

"I think she did"—it was the girl who

answered her—"but she said not to build my hopes on it as the music was uncertain, and music is important." She laughed.

"Rather!" said Mrs. Rexford, and smiled, showing possibilities of youth and gayety, which her usual indifferent, indolent glance and speech did not betray.

Rexford drew a pipe from his pocket, and making a mute gesture to ask permission from both women, lighted it. "What you people see in dancing," he began, between puffs of smoke, "I can't for the life of me make out. That sort of exercise is all very well in a gymnasium; but in the evening, dressed in one's best, in a hot room!" He shrugged his shoulders.

"I love it," said Mrs. Rexford. "I would go miles for a waltz."

"Would you—would you really?" questioned Miss Hathaway. "How funny!"

"May I ask why it is funny?" Mrs. Rexford turned her blue eyes full on Miss Hathaway, who met them with a certain constraint.

"Only—only because one does not associate you with violence and—exertion."

It was a lame answer, but the other woman made the best of it. "What a lazy creature I must be!" she said, and laughed a little. "A reputation established in a week! Here, however, is Mr. Hamilton, whom, never having heard these accusations, I may entrap into asking me to dance before you tell him my failings." She rose as she spoke and addressed the young man who approached them. "Evan," she said, "Miss Hathaway thinks I am too lazy to dance; won't you promise to ask me this evening? You know of old that I have at least the good-will to." She smiled at him that lovely smile of hers. Something in her voice struck on Rexford's ear; leaning on his elbow, he looked up at her.

She was beautiful, with a regularity of feature that made animation not to be expected—hardly desired, unless you found her, as Miss Hathaway had always done, sleepy-eyed, irresponsible, leisurely to the point of weariness. This morning the girl found it difficult to place her new conflicting impressions; but, looking at Hamilton, she felt a pang to see him gazing so intently at this beautiful young woman—not, to tell the truth, because she liked Hamilton so well, but just be-

cause there was in her something akin to the dog in Æsop's famous fable.

There were greetings, some laughter, the new-comer engaged Mrs. Rexford's first dances, and then something was happening which left Miss Hathaway breathless—he was walking off with Mrs. Rexford, and not toward the house. And she had thought him a promising cavalier of her own! She looked after them.

Rexford, closing his teeth comfortably on his pipe, leaned on his elbow and watched her. She had not been equal to that little talk *à trois*, this pretty creature of many resources; to include his wife had been beyond her; and now—she looked a little baffled. He was amused.

"You haven't got him properly trained," he said.

She was too wise to let her chagrin appear long in the eyes of this man, whom, of the two, she found infinitely more to her taste.

"I don't undertake to train Indians," she retorted, gayly. "And, at any rate, Mrs. Rexford in that mood would have no trouble in enlisting a regiment, much less a man."

Rexford looked after the retreating figures. "He does look like a red man," he said, slowly; "but what a splendid frame!—a back like a steel board—"

"And feelings made of the best wrought iron." She made a gesture of distaste. "He has a sort of fascination, with eyes like coals, that bronze cheek and straight black hair, and I wouldn't offend him for the world—I'd be afraid to; but like him—hardly!"

"Nonsense; women are like men: a little danger is the thing that tells. Now you would break a bone, Miss Hathaway, to get a genuine declaration from Hamilton—confess it!" and he leaned forward and looked into her eyes, with a laugh in his own.

She met his look unflinchingly. "Since you know me so well," she said, "tell me what I would break to get one from you, Mr. Rexford," and for one moment there was silence.

"Time's up!" cried the girl, springing to her feet; "and who's afraid now?" and she started toward the house, with Rexford following.

II.

It was a mild afternoon; a soft haze had spread over the clear sky of the morning,

and the air breathed upon you with a deprecating sweetness.

Mrs. Rexford walked up over a little hill, and then down into a wood, whose trees were, some of them, brilliant with the changing foliage, some bare, and some still clinging to their green. It was Hamilton who accompanied her, and they walked with that air of leisure that comes usually from long acquaintance.

She looked about her. "I love the autumn," she said; "I do not find it melancholy, only so beautiful that it makes one feel too much. Its beauty is more passionate than that of summer."

"That is the sense of coming death," answered Hamilton. "In saying that, you admit the thing you would deny."

"But I don't admit it at all." She stopped and faced him. "Winter isn't death—it's life—gorgeous, brilliant life, dazzling and invigorating."

"To people with eyes like yours, cut out of blue arctic ice, perhaps it is," he responded, "but most of us feel it to be the end of things and a foretaste of dissolution."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Your blood must have cooled since I knew you, Evan," she answered.

"Cooled?" he repeated. "Chilled—frozen, rather;" and there was silence.

"How long is it?" went on the young man. "Two years and six months and eight days—I have a very vivid memory, Mary."

She looked ahead of her, remembering the days of which he spoke. "What have you been doing?" she asked. "What has played a part in your life—People, Work, Money?"

"My uncle died—you knew that—and left me plenty of the last-named commodity; he had consulted the devil, and decided it was the quickest way to ruin his affectionate nephew, so, having disliked me all his life, he did me an ill turn in leaving it."

She turned to him with an expression of such gentleness, such understanding, that he stopped in his walk to wonder how he had lived without her all this time.

"You have spent it foolishly, been idle, Evan? You always said you would travel."

"I did"—he moved on again; "I have knocked about, hardening and coarsening my nature ever since. How is that for a

confession, Mary? It was your doing, you know."

She turned to him, and laying her hand lightly on his shoulder, looked straight into his eyes. "That is not true," she said.

"Quite false, I admit." Hamilton's face had changed as he saw the pain in her eyes. "You would have made any other man good beyond his fellows, who had known you as I did and loved you as I did, but I was the exception; I chose to go wrong just to spite myself. If for one moment you had ever loved me—perhaps—However, let us forget me and my selfish woes for a while and talk of other things, as we used to. You are just as beautiful, Mary—do you know it? My Heaven, how beautiful you are!"

She walked on; his last words were so familiar as to be merely friendly—he had always talked like that.

"I looked in the glass this morning," she said, "and thought I was passably good-looking, but so uninteresting, with my everlasting blue eyes and my tedious—"

"Mary! Mary!" he interrupted, half laughing, half in earnest; "don't blaspheme."

"I admit," she went on, lightly, "that the shapes of the things are correct, but so—so monotonous; I am always the same, day in and day out—I never change. It is so dull for every one."

"I am glad of that," answered the young man, eagerly, "if that means you haven't many lovers and admirers, Mary, for then I shall count as some one to you; I shall have a place."

"You are talking nonsense, Evan," she answered him, a line gathering between her brows. "Lovers! Admirers! I am married—had you forgotten that?"

"Does that preclude other men than your husband from thinking you beautiful, thinking you worth pleasing—thinking you—" He stopped.

She hesitated. "I don't mean to be absurd," she said, gently. "I like to be admired—of course I like it very much. But if you love any one, to squander your—yourself on other people is a sort of betrayal of Love. Do you know what I mean?" The color had mounted to her cheek. "One does not get things for nothing in this world—if a man is to hang about you and be attached to your train, he must be paid in some sort of coin—"

that is the world, Evan; and I—I still have beliefs and ideals."

"You—you have the scent of the Garden of Eden still hanging about you." His eyes flashed. "I remember it now—this cooler, purer air, this glow the earth has—a certain trembling grace in every flower I look at, in every leaf! Ah, Mary, Mary, why do you unlock the gates of heaven to pass in yourself alone? Must I always catch only a whiff of the perfumed air—see only a vista amid the trees—" He caught her hand in his with a passion so filled with reverence that she could not mistake him or believe he had mistaken her. She drew away her fingers and laid them on his coat sleeve.

"You wouldn't like me, my dear," she said, "if I lost what there is of good in me. Do you know that you have helped me to believe in love: that you are one of the pillars of my faith?" She smiled at him, and he looked into her eyes in a sort of frenzy of helpless allegiance.

"A sorry reed I should be to lean on," he cried. "Don't trust me; I should worship you were you changed into a witch of evil. Could you not love a fallen idol, Mary?"

She turned from him and looked before her to think her answer out. "Yes, I could love *one*"—the words came slowly—"and suffer a pang each time my eyes rested on him;" and turning, it was of other things they talked as they walked home.

III.

The music came, and Mrs. Dale's guests assembled in some number, and it being a very informal affair, they took possession of the entire place. They danced in the hall which ran through the house, and in the various rooms opening off they scattered themselves to talk. Some, more hardy than others, braved the autumn evening air, and sat on the wide terrace that led to the gardens, or wandered in the grounds, and it was altogether a night of much gayety and merriment.

After two or three dances Miss Hathaway disappeared, and if you had wanted to find her you would have had to search lengthily. She would have been discovered at last with a white silk shawl over her head, resting her arms on the wide wooden top to the balustrade that surrounded the terrace, a scarlet cloak falling over her shoulders. The crisp soft

air only gave her a sense of exhilaration; and Rexford, sitting beside her, also leaning his arms on the balustrade and looking down into the garden below, had no hat on his fair short hair, no coat over his dress suit. They looked very contented and happy—and why not? It was a case of devil take the hindmost, thought Mrs. Dale, angrily, as she swept past them and back into the house, and she was generally right in her judgments. Rexford cared not a sou for Miss Hathaway; and she—she never cared very much for any one or anything but her own good pleasure and the person who ministered to it at the moment.

But the duel was not as fair as it looked. In the first place, Rexford had no vanity to be wounded; secondly, he was amusing himself according to the code of his class and time in the set of people from whom he came; and then—then, curiously enough, quite reconcilable amid those people in that country of his, he had yet another point of vantage—he loved another woman.

It is always possible that a woman without a heart may yet suffer; and when you have said vanity, you have not said it all. There is that strange unreasonable thing called fancy. When once you have acquired a fancy for a man like Rexford, it is not easily gotten rid of.

"I ought not to stay any longer," Miss Hathaway was saying, "or Cousin Ellen will be angry. You are a dangerous married man—did you know it?"

"Unquestionably I am married," retorted Rexford, "but am I to be forbidden all amusement for that reason? I don't bite or kick. What does dangerous mean?"

"It means—it means—"

"You evidently don't know, and so I'll tell you. It means that you and I are very happy and cheerful while sitting out here, instead of being bored and dull. That's what it means; and such being the case, I hope to be dangerous for some years to come."

"Very well, then," answered Miss Hathaway, "I will stay, but you must be particularly charming, so that I can forget what a wrong thing I am doing."

"Certainly not," was the prompt reply, "forget it. Why, how little you know yourself! You prefer to do wrong things; so do I; we suit each other admirably in that respect. However, to re-

turn to our travels. I have been in ten countries to your five. Look at that! How much more I know and wiser I am, to be sure!"

She looked down, as he did, into the garden below, with every now and then a glance into the eyes that turned to meet hers.

"That is only a matter of years," she answered. "When I am as old as you are, I shall know a great deal more. You have ten years' start of me."

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"By exercising my wits. I know my own age, and I guess yours. Thirty-five—is that it?"

He smiled with the grimness that real lovers of life feel as they count their years.

"You have been kind to me," he said. "I was thirty-eight in the summer—the 10th of August, if you would like the date. I know it because, many years ago, I came of age on that day, and the old Squire made an occasion of it."

"At twenty-one you must have been a handful."

Miss Hathaway spread an end of her shawl on the balustrade, and divided it into sections.

"I suppose you did the usual things, including breaking the heart of the parson's daughter?"

Rexford laughed. "He hadn't any daughter, and the only heart I broke was my own, when I sprained my wrist and couldn't row on the 'varsity. Women were charming but very incidental then. I fell in love, of course, but it wasn't a very serious matter, and I fell out again."

"Yes." She spoke almost seriously. "Yes, you would manage your side of it very prettily, no doubt, but how about the lady?"

Rexford shrugged his shoulders. "Women are quite as capable of taking care of themselves as men are, and nothing like as susceptible. I was forgotten with the greatest ease by all my various flames, and we went on our ways rejoicing."

She plaited three little strands together. "I see. That is the sort of thing one says. It isn't at all true, nor has it the merit of originality, but it is according to the habit of men. How refreshing it would be to hear what really happens sometimes!"

He leaned a little toward her. "Ex-

cellent," he said. "And you begin. Tell the truth about some one whose heart you have broken. How you did it and what he said—also how sorry you were to part with him."

She looked up at him; there was a softness in her eyes which might have bewildered some men; it gave Rexford a keen pleasure, subtler than that he experienced in hunting, but as evanescent.

"No," she said, "I won't do that. You don't think very well of my principles, anyhow. You think I am a trifling sort of person, with no anchor to windward. Confess it. And yet what is life for but to enjoy?"

He was very near her; she was very lovely. She was tempting him, and he was conscious of it. Without any mental process he decided that he lost little, and gained—well, something worth having. She— Oh, that was another matter, her loss and gain; besides, the world does not stand still for a kiss, and the Jesuits say, "Once is never," and so Rexford kissed her. There was a moment, and then the spell that lies in such an instant was broken. Rexford drew gently back from the red lips that had met his, and straightening his shoulders, looked down in the garden below; and as he looked he became aware of two people walking toward them down one of the garden paths. He felt a sense of irritation; it was just possible he had been seen; and then as they drew nearer a sudden pang shot through him. Was not that Mary? Mary, and Hamilton beside her. His brows drew together in a line so black that Miss Hathaway followed his gaze, and so saw the couple coming toward them.

They were near, then just below; and as they turned into a path that led them away, Mary looked up at the two people who leaned upon the balustrade above. It was at Rexford she looked; he caught the glance of her eyes, and it flashed upon him like a sudden light—"On ne badine pas avec l'amour." Where did that stupid Frenchman get his phrase? Perhaps, perhaps—he leaned farther over, her name upon his lips, but it remained unspoken; he felt a light hand upon his arm.

"Mr. Hamilton will not thank you if you speak to Mrs. Rexford," said Miss Hathaway; and getting up, she drew her shawl about her. "Oof! it's chilly," she

went on, "and I think a dance will do me good. Come in and wait while I take a turn, and then let us have some supper;" and she dropped her hand again upon his arm as he stood up beside her.

"Supper is an excellent idea," said Rexford. "What would a party be without it?" And crossing the terrace, they entered the long hall together.

IV.

It seemed that every one was in high spirits that evening. Mrs. Dale, casting an inspecting eye at Mrs. Rexford as she stood at the end of the dining-room in a bay-window, whose red curtains, drawn behind her, threw her fair head in high relief, saw that she was laughing as Miss Hathaway entered on Rexford's arm—laughing merrily, her head thrown back, showing her white throat, her beautiful lips parted. Mrs. Dale also remarked the brilliant color and glance of Hamilton's dark face, and failing to make it all out, washed her hands of them.

"The air is too electrical for me," she grumbled, inwardly; "but if they can all play the same game, I no longer have any responsibility;" and she turned away to attend to the welfare of some other guests.

"There!" Hamilton was saying. "Listen! That is my favorite waltz. Leave your supper and let us have a turn. Why not? Surely you are not attached to that particular plate of chicken. Put it down; I can get you another."

"If you like," was her answer. "We used to dance that, Evan, didn't we? It sounds familiar."

"I tell you," he murmured, as they slid into the dance on the smooth marquetry of the hall—"I tell you that it is my favorite waltz. Do you suppose it could be one I had not danced with you? Are you ignorant of every rule of love, Mary?"

"Don't," she said, very low, but with a note of meaning that silenced him—"don't."

They were a sight worth seeing. The power of his tall frame gave him a swinging step that her beauty and height added grace to, and some people stood in the doorway to watch them. Miss Hathaway, whose seat had been established there, glanced up at Rexford as he handed her a plate and glass.

"Look at Mrs. Rexford," she said,

"turning poor Mr. Hamilton's head completely! Why don't you interfere?"

Foolish Miss Hathaway! She had mistaken her man. He leaned against the door near her, gazing with admirable calm upon the dancers a moment, then turned to the girl beside him.

"Shall I?" he said. "Perhaps it would be only common humanity to spare him. I will act on your suggestion." And before she had done more than feel an inkling of her folly, he had crossed the room to where Hamilton and Mary had come to a standstill.

"Mary," he said, "I can't waltz as Hamilton does; it is a great gift—I confess it—and it is denied me; but he has had his share of your society to-night; let me have my innings. Come out in the cool garden for a while. Will you come?"

He stood before her and waited.

Hamilton stared at him. He understood it all so well, and though he disliked this man, for the moment he felt the force and charm of his nature. He has done wrong; he confesses it; and the frankness, the completeness of his surrender would satisfy any woman. He looked from him to Mrs. Rexford.

She met Rexford's eyes, her own shining like stars.

"Thank you—no," she said; "I was in the garden, Alaric."

He hesitated—then, "I saw you," he said—"with Hamilton. I was with Miss Hathaway on the terrace. Will you not come with me, Mary? I am tired of all these people."

Hamilton, standing there with her hand upon his arm, felt a shock of mingled admiration and wonder. He could not have done it like that; he could never have done it with another man to hear. It was so direct; so open; could she withstand it? He tried gently to withdraw, but she held his arm with her fingers.

"I will finish my dance," she said. "I do not care to go outside again, thank you," and she turned from Rexford. "Let us go on," she added to Evan, and they glided again into the waltz.

Rexford looked after them a moment, then, turning, walked through the rooms to where a French window stood open, and so passed out of sight.

The music had ceased; and Hamilton, looking down at the fair face near his shoulder, saw a deep flush on her cheek.

"Come this way," he said, and leading her through the door Rexford had taken, he drew her across the terrace and so to a seat apart. No one remained outside; they were alone.

She sank down on the chair, her hands clasped in her lap; he dragged a bench near her, and sitting so, looked straight into her face. They were silent.

How beautiful the night was!

Hamilton felt a passion of ecstasy possess him. She was close to him; she was unhappy, and he could convince her that he at least loved her as she should be loved; and when one is suffering from a pang like hers—His train of thought broke suddenly. Suffering; yes, suffering was the word. His keen instincts gave full meaning to those bright, miserable eyes of hers; the bitter look in them struck sharply home. Was it right that she should suffer in this way? She loved Rexford, and did he no longer love her? Hamilton knew the answer to that now. But Mary? He had said she lived in the Garden of Eden, and it was true, but she must leave it and inhabit the earth—not such a bad place, after all; one could be very happy with Mary in some contented valley—with Mary, yes. The current of his thoughts changed again. Once again to tell her how he loved her, he leaned toward her.

"Mary," he said.

She was sitting with one hand on each arm of her chair, looking before her into the garden; she did not hear him.

"My God!" said Hamilton, but under his breath; and then he turned from her, and covering his face with his hands, he had a poignant sensation, such as the Inquisition could never have dealt; he passed through it, and coming out, came out another man. Dropping his hands at his sides, he looked at her again.

She was throwing from her, in her young and lovely ignorance, the desire of her heart, and he, even he, might give it back again. He felt old—as though he knew so many things. "Mary," he began again—it seemed a different word—"Mary, let me speak to you; let me break down the barriers for once and speak. I come in quite a new guise, my dear; you will hardly know me."

She looked at him; it took her a moment to drag herself from her own thoughts; then it struck her that he was being kind to her. She listened.

"You are making such a great mistake," he went on, slowly. "Do you know it?"

She hesitated. "Evan," she said, "you don't know—you—"

"Yes, I do know," he interrupted. "I know so much more than you will ever know. I know what a man feels sometimes with a woman like that. I know that you are suffering now because he has failed by a standard you have never told him the existence of. Mary"—he leaned toward her, his eyes shining—"Mary, you don't know what gradually drags from a man the ideal you are holding to now. It isn't just that you, who are never assailed by the thousand temptations of life, should expect us all to be as you are. When a man marries such a woman as you are, she should spend some of her soul in giving him an insight into her purity; she should make life over for him, as she can do—as she so seldom tries to. Have you told him that your very thoughts are sacred; told him how you would value such loyalty in him? Have you made him know that not your soul only, but your body is of fire amid the clay, and cannot endure the faults that other women brook?"

She looked at him, speechless.

He got up, and taking her hand in his, raised it to his lips. "Oh, the irony of it all!" he murmured, and turning away, he left her, and striding off through the garden, disappeared from sight.

She sat quite still; thoughts flowed over her like little waves; they cooled her brain. It was true and untrue, Hamilton's philosophy, but the truth that lay in it and above it and around it was that there must be compromise always—always—concession and compromise, compromise and concession.

A sudden memory burnt her eyes. Did many women have that to endure—that moment she had experienced as she walked toward the terrace where they sat? But then, how many women were there who had such as he to love and to be loved by? Was she unwilling to bear something for the joy of her love? And yet somewhere surely there was such a thing as a perfect love, without a pang, without a trial, without a shadow of turning. She started up, and holding out her arms to the night that seemed like a presence beside and above her, her eyes filled—filled and overflowed—a slow hard sob

rent her, and she parted with the hope that she had cherished.

Sitting down again and resting her bare arms on the table near by, she gained back her self-control slowly, the tears still wet upon her cheek.

"Mary," said a voice near her. She

raised her head, and felt a hand laid lightly on her shoulder. "Mary," he said again, "are you going to shut me out forever? I have had an hour the like of which—" He broke off, and slipping down on to the bench beside her, put out his hand—and she—forgave him.